In Camp at Murfreesboro Tenn
April 5th 1863

Dearest Lydia

I received yesterday your letter written last Sunday, and I also received one from Eph & Emily for all of which I am very thankful, but in yours I find a few things that want answering

I do not like what Carpenter said to you, I am not, will not like it — that he expected you would work for him as long as I was gone by which it would seem that all he wants you to stay there for, is to work for him and that you have got to work whether you are well or not — now that smells a little too strong of selfishness and if that is his feeling on the subject, I want you to have there if it takes all I earn to keep you

He shall not make a slave of you if I can help it — By the way Emily writes that Mathes and Jane talk of going east this Summer and that if they do you are going to live with Elvira, now I think this an agreable arrangement and hope it can be brought about, but if this should not happen, there is one thing you must abandon, and that is, the idea of housekeeping, unless you

can get convenient rooms in a house with some good family, then you might possibly enjoy yourself better but it would cost you more, but if you are satisfied that your happiness will be increased, do not hesitate on that account

There is one other little sentence in your letter — although you did not write it, I know — I reads something like this, — that I probably find other society down here that I can enjoy myself with, better than I could with yourself — Now I dont think you wrote a word of that — it was just a slip of the pen, but if you did write it I want you to take it all back, and ask my pardon and do it very humbly too

I have a great deal to write about this time but I am afraid it will fail to interest you but if it does not you may consider that you never got this letter

Last thursday, March 31st, our regiment was ordered to Salem, and the Colonel invited one to accompany him, which I did and something of what I did, and thought and saw you will find here recorded in the form of a diary which I took down while gone

Salem March 31st 1863

The regiment received orders this day at 12 M to be ready to march at this place

at two P. M. with four days rations and by invitation of the Colonel, thought I would be one of the party and see what was to be seen, and hear what was to be heard. We are here to relieve Sheridan division, and two brigades of our division are here. What the precise object of keeping a force stationed here is more than I can tell. We are about three miles out from the advance pickets of the grand army, and are here alone, that is two brigades — there is no doubt a good and sufficient reason for our being here but none that I have questioned on the subject are able to tell me what it is

As we came in here to camp, an officer rode along at full speed, from our left saying to the Colonel, ~~Engin~~ that the enemy was coming in force, and that they had driven in the pickets on the extreme left — he looked and acted very much as I do when I am excited, in fact badly scared. — but that could not have been the matter with him. — Notwithstanding this one stacked arms and the command pitched their shelter tents and the 5th Ky. are of our brigade went on picket.

Tomorrow night it will be our turn, and if my experience in picketing for the first time

4 I will write hereafter

On occasions of this kind the Head quarters train always accompanies the command by which the Colonel always has his cooks and tent with him and to day he has kindly taken me under his wing, to eat at his table and sleep in his tent and to night we retire with orders to be up in line before day break, to prevent any surprise as this is an advanced and exposed position and draws frequent skirmishes and attacks from the enemy, and when our regiment was here before they were surprised in the morning by a line of battle of cavalry in their rear, but they saw fit to leave before firing one round

April 1st

The Colonel had his command up in line before day break, and I had my command of three six mules teams up and harnessed ready for any emergency but day dawned and the sun crawled up through the trees, in the timber in which we are camped, clear and warm and no enemy appeared to disturb us — It is now 9 o'clock A.M. of April fool day and my mind naturally wanders back to my boyhood days when the arrival of this period of the year was an event of great importance and I recall many little scenes where all our Strategy and Subterfuge were brought into requisition, to effect an april fool of a brother, and notwithstanding we were ever on the alert, of the many times we were victimized with the rest — but these days & the present afford a strong contrast

4 oclock P.M.

I went back to camp to day after the mail. found Dr Warner of Dixon there but no particular news from home, and no letters for me- contrary to our expectations we do not go on picket to day. So we are laying here with nothing to do and plenty to eat

Thursday noon April 2nd — This morning at ten o clock our regiment went out on picket and I went along to see them place the guard.- It takes two regiments to make the entire picket; and they are placed in a circle, and our Regt makes half of the circle & is divided into four stations, and the ranking officer of the Squad is the Commanding Officer and here he makes his head quarters.- his outposts are then numbered, and squads are sent out under charge of a Sergeant or Corporal who relieves those already there,- this is all that has been done at this time and the Colonel has returned to camp where he can stay only making his grand rounds, three or four times in the twenty four, and on these trips when he visits every picket, to see that he is at his post and doing his duty, I shall accompany him and will report accordingly- by the way the stations are only about 1/4

rods from our camp
There are four stations, and from each station there are two outpost of eight men each. Making Eight outposts in our half circle, and they are about thirty rods in advance of the station, and from them four Sentinels are thrown out about the same distance, and they stand about twenty rods apart, although this varies to suit the character or location of the ground, as it is desirable to have the Sentinel as little exposed as possible and the shelter of some tree or fence is made use of when practicable, where they can see and not be seen, and here where there is so much timber they are able to avail themselves, in most cases of this protection. But it is often the case that the Sentinel is obliged to stand out in the open field, in plain sight for miles around. — On case of the approach of any force of the enemy, the Sentinel as soon as he is satisfied they are enemies, discharges his gun, and falls back to the outpost and a messenger is sent with the alarm to the station, and from that into camp, & then the long roll is beat which signifies, "fall in to resist an attack." In the meantime the outposts that have received the retreating Sentinels, are to skirmish with the enemy, falling back as slowly as possible to the station

and with this help to dispute the advance
loading and firing on the retreat, which
gives time for those in camp to prepare for
this reception

One thing I forgot to mention. the Stations
are numbered from right to left, one, two,
three, four, & so on as many as there happens to be
and if the first Station sends out two outposts
they are numbered first & Second outposts from
the first Station and the Sentinels from these
outposts are the first, Second, third fourth &c of the
first outpost of the first Station, and also the same
numbers from the Second outpost of the first
Station, and the next Station has the same number
of outposts & the same of Sentinels, and they number
in the same way, except that they refer to the
Second Station instead of the first, and in
case of an attack. and the Messenger is sent
in. he is able to tell what Station and outposts
and what Sentinels have met the attack, and
the commanding officer is able to prepare
himself accordingly. and in the right direction

Just about Sundown, the Colonel, the Major
and myself made the grand rounds, by
visiting every Station. outpost and Sentinel
to See that they are at their post, and at the
Stations and outposts, in the day time, on
the approach of the officer of the day, or any
officer who may be making the rounds, the

reserve fall into line and "present arms"
and the officer in command answers
any questions that may be put to him
and the Sentinels, as the grand rounds
approach, Salutes, and answers such questions
as may be asked, and if the Sentinel gives
evidence that he does not understand his
business, the grand rounds will perhaps
attempt to pass the lines, generaly at full
gallop but if he knows what he is about
before one reach the line by ten paces, he
will give the command "Halt" which brings
us up Standing, but Sometimes they loose their
wits and forgot to give the command until
after we are all by- then the poor fellow
gets a talking to

At 12 Midnight one ment the rounds again
and it means only that every one had to
halt us at thirty paces and ask who comes
there, the answer is "friends with the countersign"
or "grand rounds"- When the order is
dismount friends, or grand rounds, and advance
when one of the party, generaly an orderly for
that purpose dismounts, goes forward and gives
the countersign while the rest remain behind
until that is given, as a Sentinel is not to
allow more than one to approach him at a
time in the night

Sentinels Sometimes fall asleep at this post
Some of our regiment were found in that
condition by the Colonel, only a short time Since
he did not treat them very harshly but
punished them enough so that they will
be apt to remember it

At 4 in the morning we went round again to see to see that all was right. to prevent any morning Surprise, the rest of the time we were back in Camp. Sound asleep. So that in my Experience in picketing there is nothing unpleasant. but on the Contrary I have - enjoyed it much for the novelty of it. but I have an idea that the part I took in it is not exactly like shouldering a musket and standing there my allotted time. Especialy on a cold rainy, dark, night. and I have no curiosity that would lead me in that direction

The regiment was relieved at ten o'clock and we are quietly in camp again

It was the expectation that we would be relieved Saturday noon, but it seems that the relieving division could not get here until Sometime Sunday, and one days rations more sent out to us, and as the weather is very pleasant, and the fresh pure air, is invigorating and we are Satisfied to remain

Sunday Evening April 5th

This morning was one of the finest of the Season termed "Sunny South". The air was warm. with a Soft, gentle, breeze, - just the day for a Stroll, or to indulge in a day dream of home

in fact a model day for any pursuit, and after we had breakfasted the Colonel addressed me in the following manner "French! are you ripe for an adventure to day?" — I made answer and said that I was never in a better mood for any thing of the kind; — Well, he says," dare you ride, where I dare ride." — I respectfully submitted that it was my firm conviction, that wherever he was a mind to ride that there he would find me by his side, — "Well then we will make a reconoisance in front to day, and perhaps one will be able to perform some brilliant feats, and get our names into the papers; We can get gobbled up, I guess, if nothing more

Having armed ourselves, with pistols, each of us with one Sowed belt pistol and one large Colts Navy in our holsters, We mounted our best horses, accompanied by one mounted Sergeant, with Sowords left behind, as we were not on duty, and after having laughingly bid the boys good bye saying that the next thing they would hear from us would be that we were in Libby prison or Some other Secret place in Dixie down, we left them, —

The course taken by us, was to go back towards our old camp So far as to get outside of our Salem pickets and leave us outside of the pickets of the grand army, and through Streams and valleys, over hills and rocks we wended our

may ones to the Shelbyville pike, - and we were, the most of the time about a mile in front of our pickets, and to the Shelbyville pike from where we started about three miles We then followed out this pike as the Colonel knew there was a Station of Cavalry posted out something like two miles further, we soon found them, and further on we passed this outpost; Beyond this there were only the Videttes and just within the lines of the Videttes was a large plantation, the house with its wealth of negro cabins was only ten rods from the lines, but he said to me that there were two very fine ladies over in that house and if I felt inclined we would make a call. - I said that I was very fond of young ladies and I thought that an hours passed in this Society would do much to remind me of home and that I thought the sight of a good true union Lady would be good for sore eyes "Ah! but" they they are the wickedest little rebels in the world, but as this would promise a Spicy interview, I expressed a wish to call on them. - All right he says, but in the first place I must have you sworn, to not rave - - never mind Colonel, I swear without your saying anything further. - "well he said, "there is one other subject on which you are to have a definite knowledge -

which is that there is no such a personage in existence as Mrs Col Bennett, – on this subject your knowledge ~~was~~ is to be positive, and unqualified. I assured him that such would be for this day – my absolute knowledge of this matter

The house was a half mile from the pike, – on the left and out of sight from the, rebels on the pike and as we rode up to the house, I could not but remark how perfectly easy it would be for the rebels, if they knew we were there, to come down the hill side, dash through the rebels, – surround the house, and gobble us up before we could have time to say Jack Robinson – but I retained my own opinions, and rode up to the gate, where we dismounted, leaving our horses in charge of the Sergeant, with orders to not tie them, but keep them ready to mount at a moments notice, and to keep a good look out. – With this precaution, we applied for admission. – The house is a large two story one – commodious & tastefully built, the yard was prettily laid out with Evergreens and Shrubbery. – and evidences of womans, care, & handiwork were visible, in the many pots & beds of flowers Some of which were in bloom

One of the blackest of African daughters attended our Summons and bade us entre and were shown into a very pleasant sitting room, and after the first greeting, I learnt a very large Negro Mill, for I discovered that our Rebel, quiet, dignified Colonel was on terms of intimacy at this mansion, which could only have been obtained, by very frequent and welcome visits

The lady of the house was, apparently about thirty years of age, while her liege, Lord, & Master, had seen nearly twice that number and his locks were sprinkled with grey, but the lady was fair, fat, & full of fun.

We found here, also Capt Hutchinson, of the the 10th Ohio Cavalry, who was in command of the whole picket force, - after having presented me to the company as Quarter masters Friend; the conversation flowed smoothly along in which I engaged the old man, and the colonel the lady and as there appeared no particular use for the Capt, he took the hint and left, and then from the recesses of his clothes the Col brought forth sundry newspapers and mysterious looking packages all of which were duly presented and among the rest was a half pound of yellow Snuff, which was received with evident marks of pleasure & satisfaction -

I will here take the occasion to say, that the use they make of this article is to eat it or in their own words to, dip, to Snab, and the mildest form, is to rub, which is performed by placing a small quantity on a tooth brush and then rubbing the teeth with it, and the use of this article of commerce, in this manner, is Voted an elegant accomplishment

by the aristocracy of this chivalrous land and they indulge in it liberally.

One other little thing I noticed that I regard as very indicative; among the papers was one copy of the Chicago Times, and the avidity with which it was perused, and the expressions of delight as they found some copperhead sentiment, as does at the government, was sufficient evidence of this opinion of the character of the papers

All this time I was wondering where the nice ladies were, but I soon found out. For presently the Col "Well where are my girls," and a respectable looking darkey maid, was despatched to request this appearance, and after waiting a half hours, one of them made her entry and was warmly greeted by the Colonel & presented to Lauretta Maestes Brenek, (to whom he made his most profound obeisance) as Widow Brown; and I was struck with the resemblance this lady bore to that estimable lady in Illinois that bears my name, - it was not only a resemblance but almost an exact copy. A out soon the other Lady came in, and in the dazzling splendor of her countenance, and dress, poor Widow Brown, was the time being sank into insignificance but the Beauty was the greater Rebel of the two and the Colonel so far outranking me, and as she by virtue of some previous understanding claimed the honor of exclusively entertaining him, I transfered my attention to the Widow

We were now invited into the parlor a room very comfortably furnished, with mahogany Mark. Sofa, Chairs, centre table, Piano, and what attracted my attention more particularly, was a very elegant chandelier, suspended in the centre of the room, – a truly beautiful & costly one also the large, cheerful, fire place with its brightly polished trappings & ornaments

I cannot undertake to report the conversation as it would prolong my story to an length far beyond my present limits, for I assure you we talked fast, as all restraint was soon removed and they were free, & easy, Social & chatty, as one could wish – I afterwards learned that this had been the favorite ground of our regiment all winter, and that the Colonel had made this his head quarters and judging from appearances, that he had made rapid strides into the affections of the beauty

The status of the war was discussed freely, and we gave it to them as our firm conviction that they would be forced to sue for peace before another Xmas – they frankly confessed, they were sorry they had rebelled but doubted our ability to whip them

They were ladies of good minds, and liberal educations, but so free & Social, that in a half hours time, you would have supposed us intimate friends, and two hours passed rapidly away. but I noticed that the Colonel was somewhat uneasy for he would make frequent trips to the window, and seem with an anxious

glasses
the direction
from which the
sunlight appeared to come
and a little after noon
the ed. started to me
in a confusing manner, & said,
"Jerry, what would you do if the
rebels were to surround
the house - demanding
surrender - but before I
could speak to his question, he
turned up the walk - into the
front door appeared, and -
Sergeant there is a
colored lady to see you."
And sure enough it was
a colored lady, who said
she had come from
Mrs. Stevens plantation
to see what effect it might
have on our fate, as a
attacked, but he
had retreated by about forty
the rebels at the gate,
Officers, mistrusted
and the colored woman
Some of the attack,
was very rough.
the gallant Capt. Mills, was in plain sight,
arrived at what is called the "look out" where
Mrs. Stevens plantation, and the
Capt told us that there were
riding on to see
Capt. Mills, kept him
sergeant was with him,
that one more very
suspected - perhaps
me but I should have ridden
if I had known it was my last
ride, after having said what
I did to the colonel
in the
morning, but
did not feel
all alone

but on the contrary I did want to see one rebel and have the satisfaction, of discharging, my pistols in his direction,- I am inclined to think, however, that I should not have been so well pleased had one more ten instead of one; But the adventure was not to end just here; The first glance, after one had arrived at the look out, revealed the Seamps about a half mile from us, down the pike,- thirty or forty in number, but they were going from us, but a glance to our left through the thicket revealed a Solitary horseman watching our movements, he was not ten rods from us, ~~but the~~ and was dismounted but the ground was such that one could not approach him. So one sent him the best one had from our colts Navy, but either we were poor marksmen, or the distance was too great, he made his escape; We remained here a short time, but as no new developments were likely to be made, and the enemy had left the road about a mile from us, we picked our way, to our left to an eminence where, we could overlook the country for miles around, and down at our feet, not over a mile from us we discovered a rebel camp of Cavalry, five hundred strong, and saw the squad that had been up to see us, enter this camp and turn out their horses;- With this we retraced our steps & and rode on to the house to bid adieu to the ladies;- When we returned I was the first to enter the

parlor, and I could perceive the deepest anxiety depicted upon this countenance, and eyes were this questions, as to what we saw, and whether any one was hurt,- I asked them "why this anxiety,- have you friends with this force" When they frankly told me they had three brothers in the rebel army, and they believed they were near by.— After this the Colonel was more restless, than before, but as dinner would soon be served, and they urged us hard to stay & dine with them, they persuaded us to remain but after they had pronounced it ready to serve, it was two hours before it was ready to eat, and the meal was undoubtingly as good, as they had, but I could have made a better dinner, off from army rations,- with the exception of a cup of milk they gave me, which was really a treat, as that article and my palate have long been Strangers,— After a decent lapse of time so as not to show a too hasty retreat we rose to bid them adieu, but before I left the room, the widow stepped in front of me, looking me square in the eye, in her keen penetrating way, and in such an abrupt way as to throw me entirely off my guard, asked me "how long I had been married" - Well, did I disown you, then, - think you? no sir E. I did not but answered promptly that I had been in that interesting condition twelve years,— I am glad that I acknowledged it, an't you? for she might have fallen in love with me if I had not, and then how sad I would have felt and you too

I said to her that as long as she had drawn Mrs F into this company, I would present her in person, and as she looked at your portrait, her first words were, - "Why! don't she look like one?

I said that it did very much, and that this circumstance had enhanced the pleasure of my visit, at which she looked incredulous, and said "What! true to your wife, while you are down here in this rebel land among rebel ladies? with such temptations most you must be a model husband."

I told her that this was the opinion of Mrs French but the happiest reasons must end, and after inviting us to this plantation, after they had gained this independence we bid them adieu and returned to camp, but our division had been relieved so back we toddled to our old camp near Murfreesboro well pleased with, and feeling much better for our trip; But the boys could hardly credit our account of the Skirmish, but on examining our pistols they found five empty barrels, six mine; - So the matter remained for two days until I read the account of it in the Nashville papers, (a copy of which I send you with this) which said the charge was made by the picket force of the 10th Ohio supported by a detachment of the 75th and routed them killing two. We declared the account correct with this exception, that the detachment made the grand charge, & was supported by the 10th Ohio. and we noted the detachment some

Saturday Morning April 11th

My little story is but half told, but my time has been very much occupied with other matters, so that I could write but little each day and as it has been nearly two week since I mailed a letter to you, I will finish this sheet as I have a chance to send it by Capt Giles. But of the points of my little story where the Col and the ladies were mentioned, are not to be breathed aloud, for you will recollect that I was under oath.

I would copy my little adventure for the folks at home if I had time, but as it is, I wish you would mail it to them after you have read it.— I ought to write to them all, and will do so soon but me have no clerk now and I have been very busy making up our Monthly and quarterly reports.

Tell Carpenter, that he will find Capt Giles one of the wisest men in the world.— So far as heard from, there is nothing but what he knows, and especialy of all little Secret matters, he has been made a confidant of, for instance, my case he understands to a dot; notwithstanding this, I consider him, (and I am not alone in it) one very large Lizard ass.— but it will no doubt be very interesting to hear his definition of these Matters—

I expect a letter to day from you acknowledging the receipt of the money and if I do I will write a little to morrow

My health was never better in the world than at present— you have never sent me that little picture I asked for,— all done up in your pretties.— I dont want a case to it— One other thing I must tell you must not tell to any one, except Carpenter, and that is, that Remington has at last sent on recommendations for a Captains commission, and if he gets it why there will be a Lieut A. A. Adjt in this regiment —more on this subject hereafter— While I remain

always your devoted Orlando